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The Engineer's Bookshelf . . .

WILSON R. DUMBLE

When I say that I want to tell you about Ernie Pyle's new book, *Brave Men*, I feel sure that I do not have to explain to you just who Ernie Pyle is. Of all the war correspondents who are reporting this war, Ernie seems to me, to be just about the best known. I believe that his articles about the little man who is winning this war will live. I feel that during those days before the war, when he was a roving reporter, and when he drove into all sections of the country interviewing the waiter and the garageman, the hotel clerk and the bus driver, Ernie Pyle was furnished with a magnificent background to do just the work that he has been doing so brilliantly in the European theatre of conflict. He learned to know the man from the plains, he became acquainted with the mill hand, and he chatted with the young bell hop who took his luggage into the hotel. And now, since these men from the plains, and the mills and the small towns are manning the guns on the Western Front, it is Ernie who is more able than any other correspondent to write about them.

Actually, Ernie Pyle's *Brave Men* is the biography of the guy named Joe. So was his last book, called *Here Is Your War*. These books are made of the same stuff his columns are made of . . . in short, the story of G. I. Joe in the mud and blood of the war . . . the story of his suffering and his whimsies, of his hopes and his fears, and of his incredible bravery. It's the story of what he eats and what he wears, what he dreams about; it is the story of how he dies. It is not a story of an epic sweep, of grand strategy, of continents warring against continents. This is the story of weary, blood-stained, hungry little men, fighting their own innumerable little wars from foxholes and plane bellies, from batteries and command posts. It is Ernie Pyle at his best and there can be no finer recommendation for any book.

In *Brave Men* the author says in effect: "Here is G. I. Joe, fighting and dying for what he believes to be right." His name may be Murphy, Raveli, Goldstein, Swanson, or just plain Smith. He may be a Protestant, a Catholic, or a Jew. He may be white, or black or yellow. He may be fifth-generation, or native born American, or a recent immigrant. Whatever his group affiliations are, it makes no difference. It is irrelevant, and immaterial and trivial beside the fact that he is an American, and above all that he is a man fighting side by side with his fellow men. Dan-

ger and death have united these men, united them into a great fraternity in which there are no longer any ancient differences, or petty jealousies or vicious prejudices. Indeed, we on the home front might well take a lesson from our fighting men overseas, and make certain that the understanding and the fraternalism which were developed under the stress of warfare continue in order to assure a lasting peace.

Brave Men begins with the landing in Sicily and proceeds through the battle for Italy and the savage climaxes of the Normandy invasion. Ernie Pyle tells the story of G. I.'s in the Infantry, Artillery, Engineers, Medical Corps, Air Corps, and the many other branches of service, as only he can tell it. In short, if you want to read an account of our fighting men that can't be equalled, *Brave Men* is a "must."

Early in October, I received my review copy of *Brave Men* from its publisher, Henry Holt. Within two or three evenings, I had read the entire book, and I admit that I re-read several passages more than once. Because it reminds me of an incident in one of my Army classes last February, I want to tell you about a certain article. In one of those Army classes, I had a student named Sgt. Don Andrews. He was a Texan, tall and handsome, every bit a soldier. Don came from an Army family; in fact he was an Army brat—so called. He had lived his short life at Army posts all over the world. He was an intelligent lad, an extremely interesting person to have in class. I had been attracted to him the first day in class because on his sleeve he wore the insignia of the 83rd division, my old War One division. Since he was the leader of the class group, Don reported the absentees to me every day before the class began; and in this way I got to know Don a little better than any of his comrades.

One day in February, Don asked me if I had read Ernie Pyle's column the night before, and it just so happened I had missed it. "I clipped it out, sir," Don said, "and we fellows would like to have you read it to the class."

Well, I did read it to the class, and I want to re-print it here. But before I do, I also want to continue the tale of what happened to my review copy of *Brave Men*. After I finished reading *Brave Men*, I carefully wrapped it up and addressed it to Sgt. Don Andrews, Regt. Hdqrs. Co.,

319th Inf, APO No. 80. On the fly leaf I wrote an inscription, and I quote, "hoping the men of Hdqrs. Co., 319th Inf. will enjoy the article on page 154 as much as Don Andrews enjoyed it in my English class last February."

Several weeks ago, believe it or not, I received a letter from Sgt. Andrews, thanking me for *Brave Men*; the letter was also signed by more than one hundred soldiers who had read the book, or who had read, at least, the two pages beginning on page 154.

Here is that particular article, and I pick it, not only because of the foregoing incident but also because it is, after all, Ernie Pyle at his best.

In this war I have known a lot of officers who were loved and respected by the soldiers under them. But never have I crossed the trail of any man as beloved as Captain Henry T. Waskow, of Belton, Texas.

Captain Waskow was a company commander in the Thirty-sixth Division. He had led his company since long before it left the States. He was very young, only in his middle twenties, but he carried in him a sincerity and a gentleness that made people want to be guided by him.

"After my father, he came next," a sergeant told me.

"He always looked after us," a soldier said. "He'd go to bat for us every time."

"I've never known him to do anything unfair," another said.

I was at the foot of the mule trail the night they brought Captain Waskow down. The moon was nearly full, and you could see far up the trail, and even part way across the valley below.

Dead men had been coming down the mountain all evening, lashed onto the backs of mules. They came lying belly-down across the wooden pack-saddles, their heads hanging down on one side, their stiffened legs sticking out awkwardly from the other, bobbing up and down as the mules walked.

I don't know who that first one was. You feel small in the presence of dead men, and you don't ask silly questions.

They slid him down from the mule, and stood him on his feet for a moment. In the half-light he might have been merely a sick man standing there leaning on the others. Then they laid him on the ground in the shadow of the stone wall alongside the road. We left him there beside the road, that first one, and we all went back into the cowshed and sat on water cans or lay on the straw, waiting for the next batch of mules.

Then a soldier came into the cowshed and said there were some more bodies outside. We went out into the road. Four mules stood there in the

moonlight, in the road where the trail came down off the mountain. The soldiers who led them stood there waiting.

"This one is Captain Waskow," one of them said quietly.

Two men unlashed his body from the mule and lifted it off and laid it in the shadow beside the stone wall. Other men took the other bodies off. Finally, there were five lying end to end in a long row. You don't cover up dead men in the combat zones. They just lie there in the shadows until somebody comes after them.

The unburdened mules moved off to their olive grove. The men in the road seemed reluctant to leave. They stood around, and gradually I could sense them moving, one by one, close to Captain Waskow's body. Not so much to look, I think, as to say something in finality to him and to themselves, I stood close by and I could hear.

One soldier came and looked down, and he said out loud, "Damn it!"

That's all he said, and then he walked away.

Another one came, and he said, "Damn it to hell anyway!" He looked down for a few last moments and then turned and left.

Another man came. I think he was an officer. It was hard to tell officers from men in the dim light, for everybody was bearded and grimy. The man looked down into the dead captain's face and then spoke directly to him, as though he were alive, "I'm sorry, old man."

Then a soldier came and stood beside the officer and bent over, and he too spoke to his dead captain, not in a whisper but awfully tenderly, and he said, "I sure am sorry, sir."

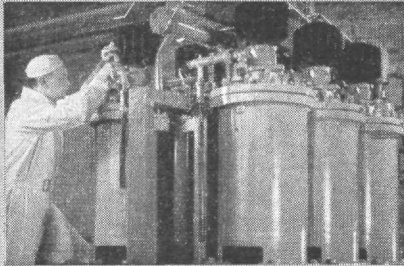
Then the first man squatted down, and he reached down and took the captain's hand, and he sat there for a full five minutes holding the dead hand in his own and looking intently into the dead face. And he never uttered a sound all the time he sat there.

Finally he put the hand down. He reached over and gently straightened the points of the captain's shirt collar, and then he sort of rearranged the tattered edges of the uniform around the wound, and then he got up and walked away down the road in the moonlight, all alone.

The rest of us went back into the cowshed, leaving the five dead men lying in a line end to end in the shadow of the low stone wall. We lay down on the straw in the cowshed, and pretty soon we were all asleep.

And to that interesting bit of writing, may I add this information: Captain Waskow was a first cousin of Sgt. Don Andrews. This, I learned after class on that day last February when I first read the article by Ernie Pyle.

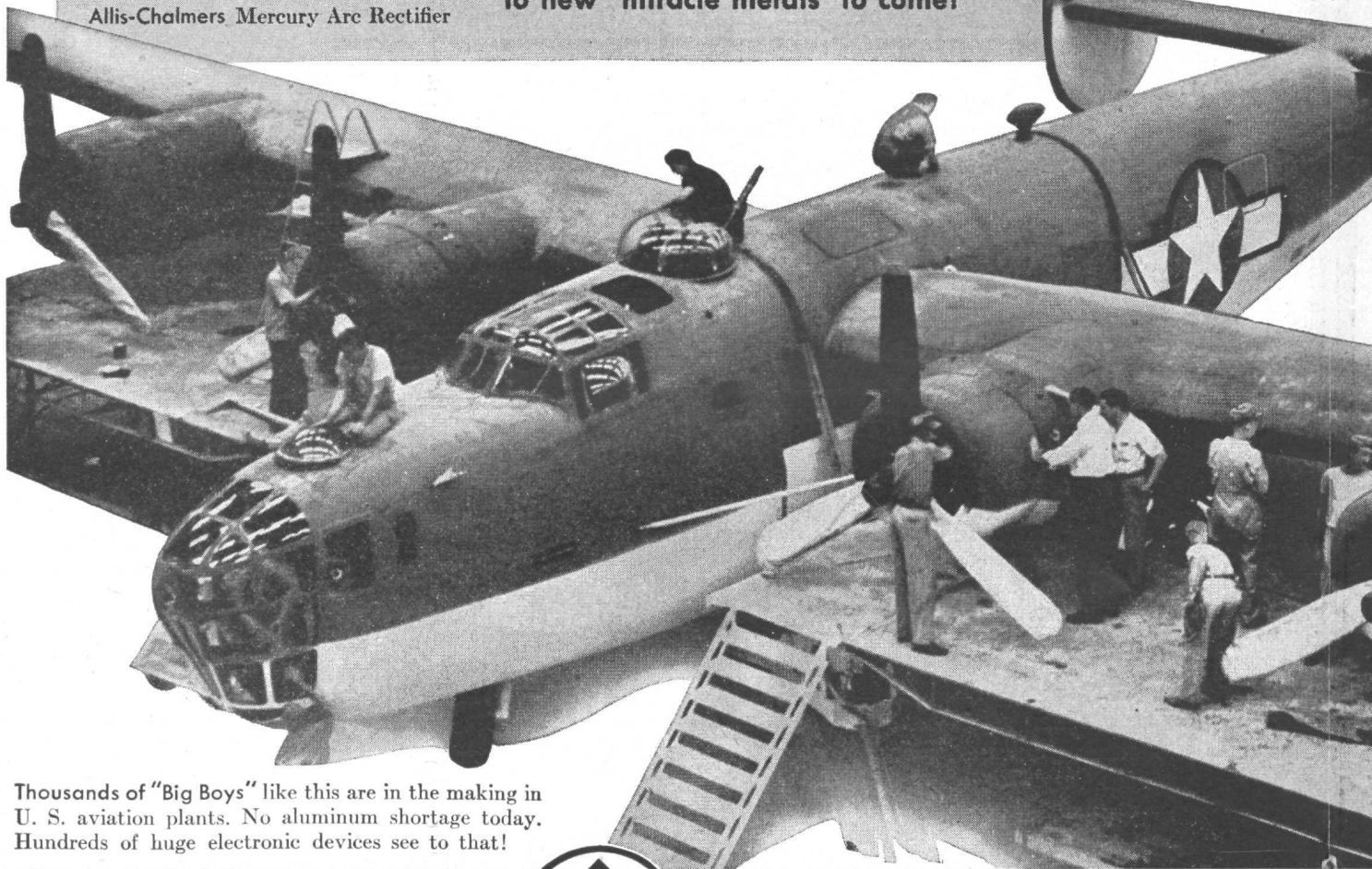
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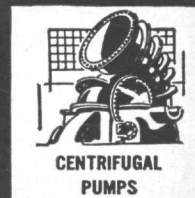


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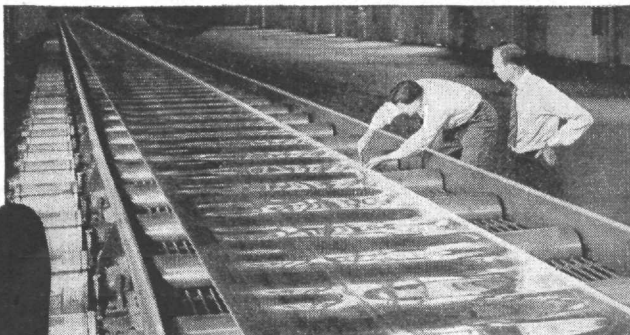


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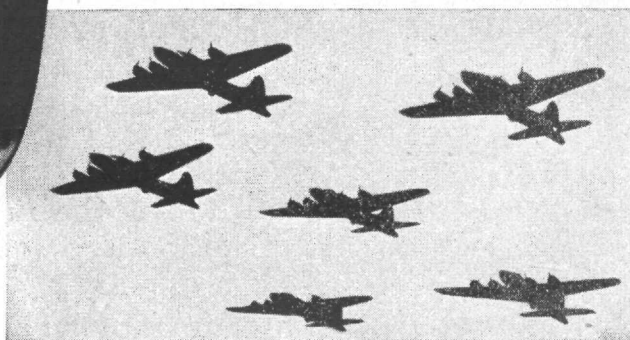


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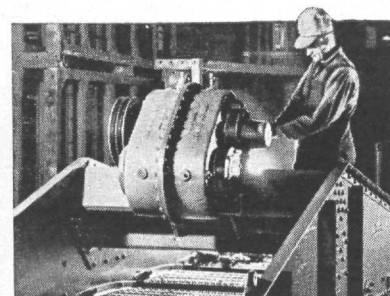
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